

The Avant-Guardian is a free newspaper published by KRAAK.

# THE AVANT GUARDIAN 6

Its mission is providing background information concerning  
KRAAK-organised events.

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# Dear reader,

You are holding the 6th edition of our irregularly published newspaper. It presents the second edition of the great collaborative project called Eastern Daze. For those who missed out the first edition: it's a one day festival and draws you into the immersive effect that trance music is supposed to have. It leaves you with a burning ache between your ears, or in your stomach. Depends what you engulf too much, the music or the hallucinogens. It hints towards an euphoric feeling caused by becoming part of the collective, a drop in the ocean as zen buddhists say.

Trance music is from all places, and from all times. Actually, when you think about it, it's the very core of music. It bends space-time and makes you chasing your own tail. It makes you forget your highly individual attitude, whereas the 'we' embraces the 'I'.

Before you call me a fascist, which I completely understand because the ideas lined out above relate to both fascism as communism. Nowadays those ideas seem to be stored in the dark corners of history, recalling ghost from dark times. The anti-rational and the collective, remember?

## T H E A V A N T G U A R D I A N BUT LET'S EXPLORE SOME THOUGHTS:

### 1 THERE IS SOMETHING HAPPENING AT THE BORDERS OF EUROPE.

You might have heard rumours about strangers invading Europe, in herds of thousands and thousands. There is something happening at the borders of our well-faring, preciously cared and nourished Europe

It reminds me of the end of the Roman empire, when the Germanic tribes were pushed (back) into the territory of the Roman Empire. The Huns were expanding their part of the world, because they needed more space for their herds, or maybe it was straight up imperialism. The consequences were profound: an empire collapsed and got divided. Dark ages and Catholicism got a grip on Europe.

But what to think about the the so-called refugees in the early 21st century? The newspapers are full of ideas how to handle the crisis. Although, one question no-one asks: *why are these people coming here?* Possible answers that could be questions in themselves: do they come to destroy our system? Do they want to take our daughters and wives? Will they drink all our well-earned beer?

Easy answers: I think they run away from countries with a destroyed system, so I don't think they want to destroy ours. Most of them are running together with their families, so why taking something you already have? And about our beers, well, most of them are muslim...

Knowledge is traveling faster around the globe then ever. Young people born in the rich West have a whole world lying wide open for them. Artists do residencies and present their music everywhere. There are two words for those phenomona: expats or refugees. But when to apply one of those synonyms depends on where you have been born and if you are been considered as the 'other'. Food for thought.

### 2 OUR MENTAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FRAME IS CENTRED AROUND THE 'I'.

The second idea is related to the above paragraph: the current mental-social mindframe is centred around the 'I'. In the West the highest value of all is individuality. Everything is 'I', and succes, failure and all depends if I work hard enough. The 'I' can realize everything what it want, and if I fail, it is my own fault.

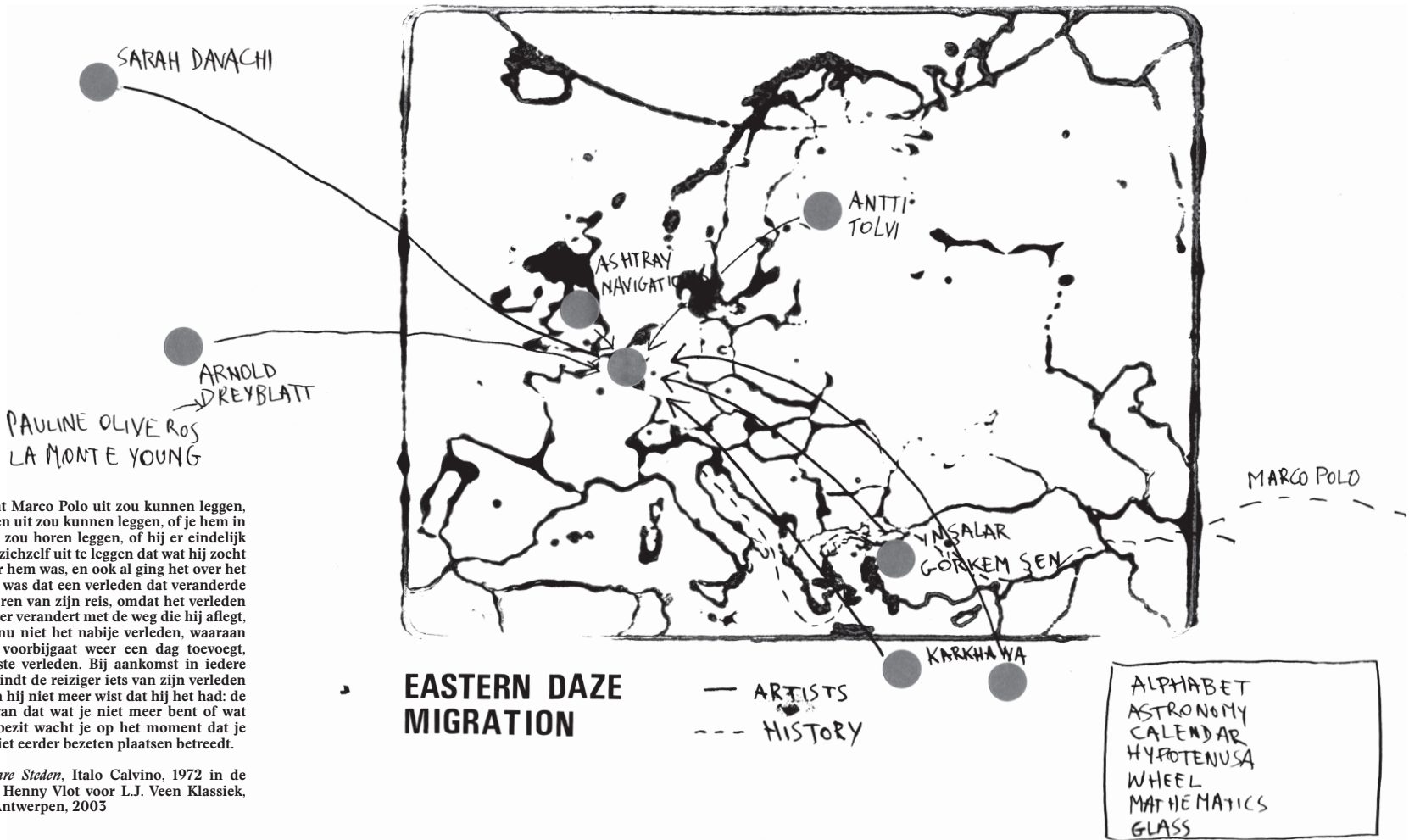
An opposed, but very present force in our society is transcendental living. There's no place in the world where so many people take drugs, and dope themselves with natural highs generated by sports. Music is a perfect catalysator, as the 'I' is submerged in collective while dancing, watching a concert, or getting drunk at a festival. Transcendentalism is closely related to the idea of the 'Other'.

Although transcendentalism can be considered as the very core of our society, the Other and the Collective are marginalized. They are seen as things we have to fear. Drugs are illegal, the idea that the 'I' is nothing more than a pinball played by bigger social and economic forces is denied and put away as leftist, outdated thinking.

### 3 TRANSCENDENTAL MUSIC IN THE BIGGEST ART CENTRE OF GHENT MIGHT BE A DELUSION.

In Ghent there is this giant building, close to the highest point of the City. It's the Art Centre Vooruit, where this festival is taking place. It's located in a nice area, on a stone's throw from the famous Book Tower—on actually the highest point, the top of Mount Blandijn. This Tower is an old and beautiful modernist building containing almost all knowledge owned by the university. It was designed by the famous architect Henry

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Dit alles opdat Marco Polo uit zou kunnen leggen, of in gedachten uit zou kunnen leggen, of je hem in gedachten uit zou horen leggen, of hij er eindelijk in zou slagen zichzelf uit te leggen dat wat hij zocht altijd iets vóór hem was, en ook al ging het over het verleden, dan was dat een verleden dat veranderde met het vorderen van zijn reis, omdat het verleden van een reiziger verandert met de weg die hij aflegt, en ik bedoel nu niet het nabije verleden, waaraan elke dag die voorbijgaat weer een dag toevoegt, maar het verste verleden. Bij aankomst in iedere nieuwe stad vindt de reiziger iets van zijn verleden terug waarvan hij niet meer wist dat hij het had: de vreemdheid van dat wat je niet meer bent of wat je niet meer bezit wacht je op het moment dat je vreemde en niet eerder bezeten plaatsen betreedt.

Uit: *Onzichtbare Steden*, Italo Calvino, 1972 in de vertaling van Henny Vlot voor L.J. Veen Klassiek, Amsterdam/Antwerpen, 2003

Van De Velde. Despite it's rotten condition, the tower still stands as a beacon for Western civilization, progress and culture. Both buildings once embodied old European values.

The Book Tower is slowly disintegrating, due to lack of budget. In this process it's becoming a symbol for the cultural shift from the collective towards the individual. From the Socialist, in which budget is a means, towards the Neo-liberal, in which budget is the main goal. Knowledge is found on your personal computer, not in a public institute. It has it good side, as knowledge is build up horizontal through a giant network, but this shift has a strange taste.

A more hidden, but parallel shift you see in the art centre. It was once a cooperative and socialist place to educate and lift the working class culturally. Nowadays you can call it a leftist hub for higher educated middle class. It embodies creativity, individual expression and exploring so-called new ideas for society. Also here comes in the important rol for the 'I'—a focal thought in the neo-liberal mind—the art centre produces and empowers the hyper individual visions of the 21st century artist.

In this hub for the individual expression people will gather on November 28th. They will share collectively the transcendental visions of the artists invited to perform at the Eastern Daze festival. There is an expression which is probably outdated: 'contradictio in terminis'.

#### 4 THE DRONE BRINGS THE FOUR STATEMENTS ABOVE TOGETHER.

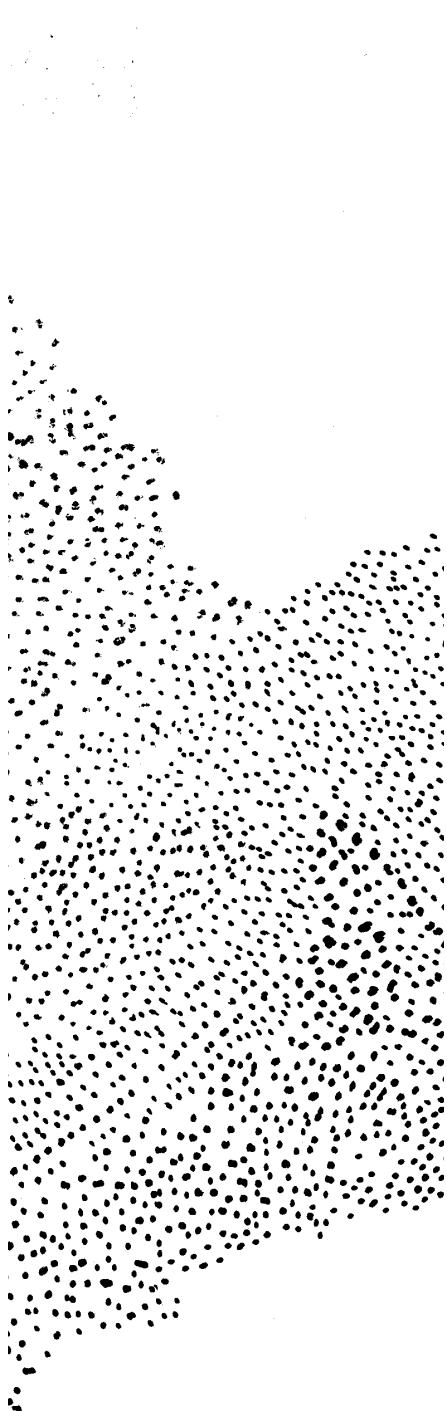
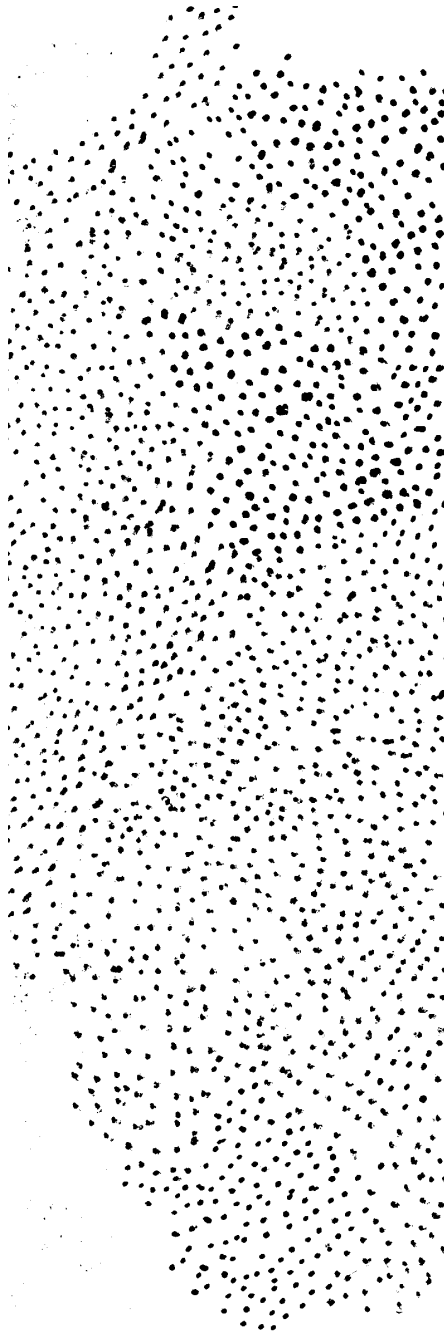
The seven artists playing on this edition of Eastern Daze use a similar, ancient old technique in their music—e.i. The Drone. It's an acoustic phenomon which reveals itself out of long pitched tones, harmonically positioned in such a way that the frequencies start interacting, and open up endless possibilities to beautiful over- and subtones. You might know this, or not, but overtones are actually an acoustic illusion. A bit like the effect that occurs when you stare long enough to two black points on a white background. Or more concrete: the drawing of the portrait of Freud, in which you see a naked woman in his hair. The drone connects individual sound phenomona, resulting in more than the sum of its parts.

Let's connect some dots. The Drone, when well done, creates an immersive effect in which you feel embraced by the collective. You finally get rid of this annoying hyper self-aware state of being. As I reasoned, this state of being is induced and enhanced by the neo-liberal mind frame, centered around the 'I'. The 'I' takes a central rol in an art centre like the Vooruit. Which is strange, because in past times Vooruit symbolized old European values—social welfare and the collective. When you look to what's happening in the Old Europe, you see a big paradox: there is a massive fear for the 'Other', which is at the same time actually the very core of European humanism.

By the way: a drone refers also to a certain type of character in Star Trek. It's a human being, assimilated by the dangerous robot species called the Borg. Again the Collective to be immersed in.

I would say, think about this all when you enjoy the festival.

Niels Latomme, Ghent, 14 oct '15



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**Antti Tolvi is one of the key figures in the Finnish improv scene emerged in the beginning of the 00ties, spoiling the world with loads of stunning, highly inspiring tapes and cd-r's. Tolvi grew up in Panelia, as small village at the coast of Finland. He studied Indian Classical music and played in cult bands like Lau Nau, Lauhkeat Lampaat and Kemialliset Ystävät.**

**Last year he stunned the world with a three side vinyl, called 'Pianoketi' (Fonal), on which he displayed three beautiful minimalist improvisations on a detuned piano. The pieces weave fragile textures of slightly outworldish tapestry, referring to Terry Riley and Lubomyr Melnyk.**

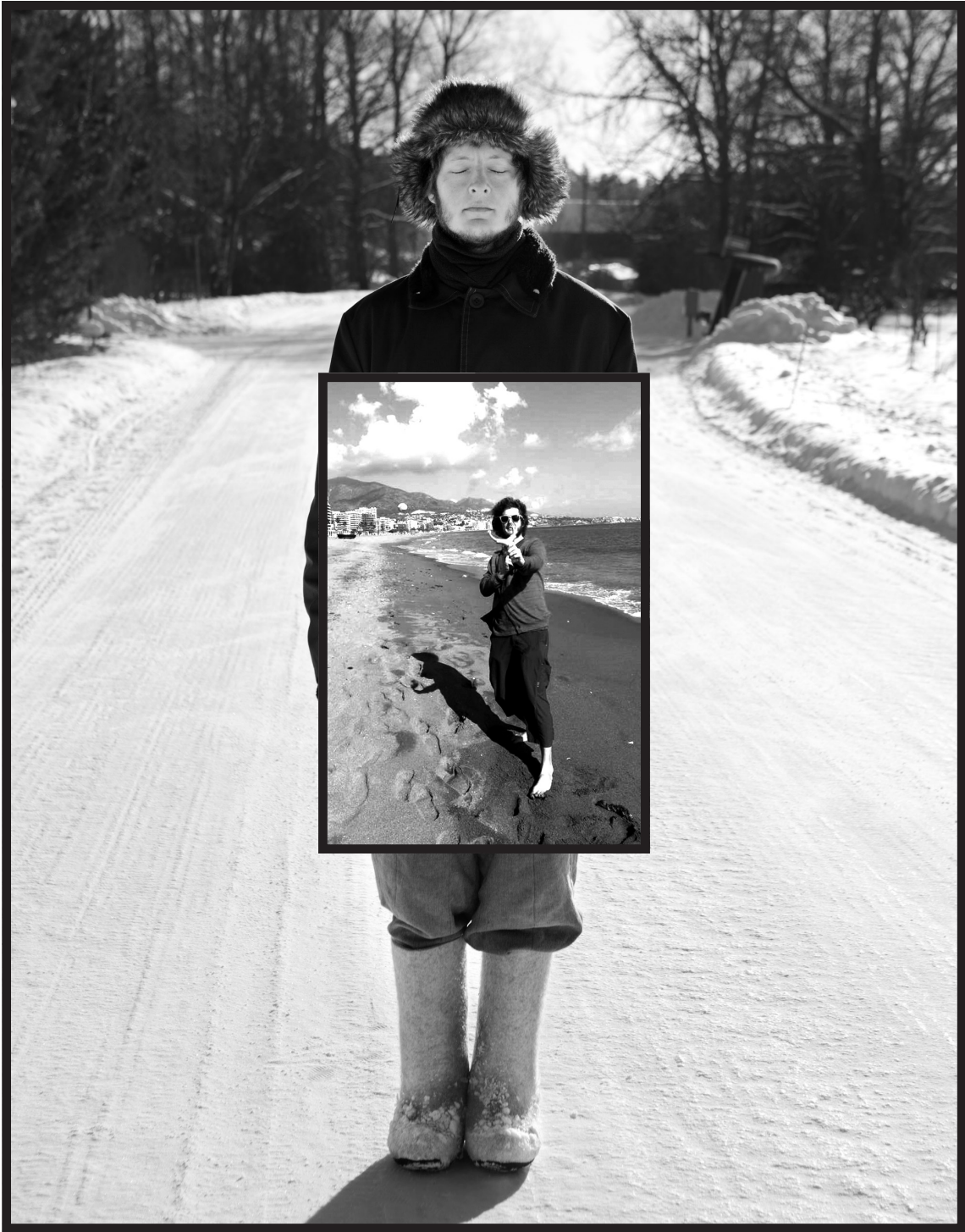
**PB** Hello Antti, you're well known as one of the profound members of the Finish underground music scene. You played in many projects in different styles and genres and travelled around Europe and USA to present your work. But in the context of our festival I'd like to ask you some questions about the minimalist 'Pianoketo' record you made two years ago, which got released on the Finish Fonal records.

I was searching the Internet to find out which island exactly you live in Finland, I wanted to ask if you live in that part where there's complete darkness in winter and endless daylight in summer. It would have been the perfect start for this interview, thinking of the idea that this warped time experience could be the inspiration for the piano pieces you released 2 years ago.

**AT** Hello! Thanks for your kind words. We live on the Kemiö island, and it's in the very south of Finland, I call it the Canary islands of Finland. So no 24 hours of sun/darkness here. From here you have to drive 900 km to arrive at the arctic circle (from there you can still drive another 500 km to arrive at the northeast corner of Finland). But still here you can feel the seasons pretty strongly. One month around midsummer is pretty bright all the time, and also dark in winter. But has that influenced me? That's a yes and no I guess. Someone asked from an old man in Lapland what he thinks about the northern lights and the tunturis (big hills in the north). Well, he said, they're there and I hardly see any beauty or mighty in them. Luckily I have started to see some beauty somewhere.

Before I was thinking that I don't like autumns/winters so much. The end of a sunny and warm summer, a rainy, gray, cold, windy and dark season starting. But then I started to focus little more to everything, and starting to let go the idea of liking something or not. Things just are as they are, you just make that judgement if it's good or bad. In autumn and winter you just slow down your life and have more time to go into yourself. Because of long winters, summers are pretty full of life and action all around. For me Pianoketo is about letting things go. I just let the music come and listen. Enjoying it.

**PB** When listening to the Pianoketo record it's easy to relate to the piano works by La Monte Young and Dennis Johnson, on the other hand I hear a different approach in your



work, the idea sounds less rigid, more playful.

**How serious did you take the whole minimalistic concept?**

**AT** I was just in an academic conference about minimalism music, and I realised that I still don't know what the word minimalism means. But I don't have anything against it either. Most of the stuff which comes with that word, I enjoy a lot.

I guess most of my music is minimalism. It's minimalism for me because music doesn't move so much. You kind of enter into the sound. Let it fill the space. And you just float in the sound.

And about that playful thing. I guess, because I have played all kind of instruments and none instruments all my life, I'm pretty playful. I have a nice memory when I was in my teens and found these sound installations with our tractors. Our Ford 7700 (turbo) had this really weird whistle sound in it. Then next to it there's a huge combine with nice bass sounds and another Case tractor

# ANTTI TOLVI

**T H E A V** next to that (and if the season was right, there's a grain dryer humming background, with really hypnotic drones). The sound was monumental! The soundscape of my childhood was pretty engine based I guess. So of course I had to start play solos with that Fords whistle over everything. So usually when I find sounds, I pretty fast start to play with them. And I just learned that when human being stops playing (here I mean also other things that sounds), he is becoming old.

**AT** Yes, I found this sitar player Sri Tarak Nath Mishra, and he gave me some lessons. But the problem was that I haven't had played sitar so much before going to India, so it took a pretty long time to get the basics first. But I have to say that I learned more about North Indian Classical music from going to concerts than from actual lessons. In Indian Classical music, studying is basically that you repeat what your master is playing.

**PB** You stayed for only one year, was it to get an insight in their culture and to get inspired by their musical practices or did you really intent to go and learn to play the Hindustani raga music, in the traditional sense? As this takes normally half of a lifetime I wonder if it's even possible for a Western musician to get grip on their musical tradition.

**AT** Well, first, I was there only a few months. And second, I was little too young back then I guess. Varanasi was pretty too much for young countryside boy from the quiet / spacious north. That time I was really into all kinds of free jazz / impro. Then I found out that similar stuff has been done somewhere like thousands of years. Of course I had to go there and learn! But pretty fast I realized the same thing you said. It was pretty impossible to me to play raga in a traditional sense. So, since 2000 I have tried to find some way to play some kind of raga with Indian instruments. And actually this year, after 15 years, I have played my first raga (my own, but I still like to call it a raga) with flute / tambouras live. First performance was in Los Angeles. I had to travel that far to have the guts to do it. I still don't feel that it works as it should, so the work goes on. It's very hard to unite melody to drone. I guess Pianoketo is kind of a raga too. You have notes (melody) and you have drone. As Pandit Pran Nath puts it, the body is a note, breath is a raga.

And here we can come back to the term minimalism. In the minimalism conference someone said, that minimalism is that you focus to background (drone), instead of solo thing happening over it. Because I'm very interested about that background drone, it's hard for me to add melody over it. So they must become the same. And I think this is what works in pianoketo pretty well.

**PB** You recorded the entire piece on an old detuned piano. Do we need to detune the piano for your live set at the festival as well to get the same result? How important is the tuning for this piece?

**AT** Before I liked to detune pianos a bit. But now I think it's more like I play what I have given. I try to get away from perfectionism. And isn't everything perfect all the time anyway. So, every tuning works in its own way. And that's enough for me. Usually.

I like the story (I have no idea whether it's true or not) about some Zen monks (Sui Zen? Blowing Zen, monks practiced Zen through playing flutes). Monks made bamboo flutes, but they didn't make the finger holes. They gave bamboos to children, and they randomly made the holes. Then the monks took the flutes back, and played/practiced with what was given.

Pauwel De Buck

**A N T G U A R D I A N** So yes, Pianoketo is really playful. No serious minimalism. I think it's pretty folky in its own way.

**PB** How did you record the piece? It sounds as funny, constantly moving, bending and swinging around, as it sounds dramatic, like there is an aim to capture the entire space, all reflections included. What was the actual idea behind your recording process?

**AT** Yes, I just tested my new binaural mics that day. These mics you can locate to your ears. So while playing and moving your head you make this natural effect to the sound. After listening these test recordings it was easy to take this effect as a part of the piece.

**PB** In 2000 you travelled to Varanasi in India, to study classical Indian music. Personally I can really enjoy Indian Raga, but I only know the old masters, with who did you take lessons, what instrument did you learn to play?



# ASHTRAY NAVIGATIONS

We sat down with Phil and Meg, over the wires of the interweb and talked about ethnic music, the Northern England DIY scene and On The Beach.

Phill Todd en Melanie Delaney are the core members of the legendary British noise duo Ashtray Navigations. Called after an album by an obscure 70ties psych band, they produced since 1991 an endless stream of cd-r's tapes and lp's embodying an unique form of British pyschedeliae. It's a trashcan full of wild tape collages, far out electronics, pastoral drones and acid guitar solos. No wonder the great VHF records released last summer their new and highly recommended album 'a shimmering replica'.

## ON ETHNIC MUSIC

NL We invited you for the Eastern Daze festival which highlights the parallels between ethnic transcendent music and avant-garde, noise and psychedelic underground music. I wondered if you were influenced by ethnic music yourself?

PT I have to admit to being influenced by all music, including music I don't like much. Which brings us to the problem of defining "ethnic music". We had singing, playing and dancing to traditional British/Irish music at my school when I was a child, and that's probably pretty ethnic and exotic to non-Europeans. There's people making traditional music in the Scottish Isles that you'd swear is from, say, India if you didn't know the details.

I'm more interested in the process of *becoming* exotic and/or ethnic than in taking ideas from ethnic music.

Although we do that as well. If you hear something and like it, it is hard not to take a little something away. It's also an obvious thing for someone who grew up in the Western musical tradition and wishes to expand their musical horizons to look to the East, even if only as far as Hull.

I don't really study musicology and I'm not a good enough musician to copy anybody—which rightly brings in a load of issues to do with appropriation, privilege and power, as the academics will quickly remind us. What I am interested in is making something which sounds close, but distant. Much

like my own response to experiencing music or art that I didn't fully understand. But if the question is "do you own a lot of records on the Ocora label" the answer is: yes, I got some.

MD I grew up in a household where Irish songs were always sung. From an early age I have always had an uneasy feeling of being 'other' than truly English, although I didn't realise what this feeling was until I grew up. So I suppose in a way my family background could be classed as exotic to some in England. We are a nation of immigrants. The music and cultures of all these different groups have always mixed in our cities, be that Irish, Polish, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, West Indian, or whatever. It's impossible not to be slightly influenced by this.

## ON THE UK UNDERGROUND SCENE

NL How do you see the UK noise scene, which Ashtray Navigation seems to have kicked off in the 90ties?

PT I don't really know, and I always feel a bit dissassociated from these questions about the Northern England Sound as I am still a midlander at heart—Ashtray started in Stoke On Trent which is a place nobody asks about much. I'm a bit out of the loop with the UK noise scene these days but I'd say it incorporates a lot of different approaches (you wouldn't call Smell

& Quim transcendental, much) and I definitely get a transcendental vibe from, say, Hijokaidan and C.C.C.C., two old favourites from back in the day. But if you're talking Bower, Campbell, Vibracathedral et al, we were all pals and influenced each other I'd say.

NL Why is it that North England has such a vibrant scene of improvisational music, with its own distinct sound and approach?

PT Yorkshire has a long and rich history of unpretentious and unacademic avant garde-ism—Jeff Nuttall, Termite Club etc—and its hard not to be influenced by that also. Making experimental music and being from a northern (or midland) working class background, well it isn't something that is meant to happen, is it? The media only really pays attention to genre music (rock, dance or whatever) and it helps to be from London or at least Manchester. And the media's music coverage is so fashion orientated. If you're doing experimental or unpopular music of any sort it helps to have a private income, preferably a millionaire at least. There are no rewards except for the joy of making something. To do what we do, you have to be pretty determined and bloody-minded, or you'll give up after six months. Most people do, and thats fine, but I'm in this for the long haul.

NL Do you see a direct lineage from early psychedelic British music over a band like Spacemen 3 to what you and by example Vibracathedral Orchestra are doing?

PT I saw Spacemen 3 play at Keele University as a youngster and they were unlike anything else going on at that time and were a huge influence. I don't like their records though, they are nothing compared to the impact of the live show, especially at that time in the early 90s. But they were hardly original, I get the feeling they were just trying to revive and/or reinterpret, say, what they'd heard about Pink Floyd at the UFO club in '66 or whatever. There's a linkage between what we do and that too I think. I don't think its a direct line though, more of a jagged and hall-of-mirrors style link as it is mediated by time and place and subsequent re-interpretation. I'm perfectly happy to think that the members of Pink Floyd, Spacemen 3, etc would hate what we do if they heard

it. I do what I do without thinking "what would such and such have done". Ashtray, Vibracathedral. Spacemen 3 and, say, Hapsash & The Coloured Coat are very different from each other but it's likely that a human could love all four. I am that human!

MD There is definitely a lineage, just not in music but in a whole countercultural continuum. It makes me rather sad when I hear old sixties figures on TV putting down the youth of today, saying they're all boring, talking as if raves, drug orgies, happenings, travelling, free festivals and squatting are things from the past. I just think 'it's still going on, it never went away!'. The Freak Empire never ended! To the majority of people in Leeds the strange noise happenings of Smell and Quim or the

Bongoleeros were seen as little pockets of eccentricity. Actually they're part of a deep seated tradition of avant garde art and performance that has existed in Leeds since at least 1900. From the activities of The Leeds Art Club to the transformative activities of groups like Welfare State and John Bull's Puncture Repair Kit and onto the Termite Club, I think there is a definite line. Even if all these people were working in cells, not aware of each other, I think they all picked up on the same mood and carried it forward.

NL Do you seen a profound impact of the internet on the underground scene?

PT Yes, it has changed things totally and music is everywhere, like air. Even the most obscure things imaginable can be easily found. The problem is 'what to choose from the banquet'. Its a double edged sword and sometimes I miss things about the old days—making music and trading tapes with friends without the feeling that you're being watched all the time, or you have the potential to be watched all the time. On reflection though, I'm happier to be here now than back there then.

MD It makes it harder to be an 'outsider'. Before you got a sense that a lot of musicians outside the metropolises worked quite hermetically, or in small groups of friends. It was hard to find other people into weird music. That meant that music was more individualised. Now I think it is easier for people to adopt a 'house style' quicker, genres move in faster and faster waves. Most musicians seem happier to conform to something that everyone else is doing, whereas in the 80s and 90s everything seemed to be a reaction against what was happening.

The internet takes a lot away from actual music making time. Everyone always seems to be shouting about what they're doing or checking up on what everyone else is doing, instead of getting down to stuff. If the underground is overground should it make a sound?

## ON DIY AND RELEASING RECORDS

NL Is the DIY-approach important for you?

PT A *Do It Yourself* approach is important if nobody else will *Do It For You*. When I started playing music in Stoke in the early 90s the idea that anyone would offer me a recording contract or anything was so utterly preposterous and unlikely that I never considered anything other than DIY as an option. I never saw the need to start bragging about being DIY like punk and indie bands did or maybe still do. It wasn't a lifestyle choice for me—which would be overturned when a big record company comes a-callin'—, but the only way of getting my music out.

NL Is the massive amount of releases meant to document everything that happens in Ashtray Navigations?

PT There are so many Ashtray records because I'm addicted to the joy of making things, rather than an attempt to document everything. Envisioning an eventual release gives me something to work towards and keeps the wheels moving. In order for my music to develop, I always see the need to put a





“finished product” of some kind in front of a (miniscule) audience. I don’t want to sit around at home playing a load of unfinished backing tracks to myself and thinking “this sounds OK I should finish it some day”.

**NL** How do you feel about the interaction of being a musician and releasing stuff of other people on your own label(s)?

**PT** I don’t tend to release stuff by other people any more. There have been a few exceptions but I’m trying to give it up totally. I don’t feel I can do other peoples work enough justice. My label has no distribution and no profile and there’s many other labels who can do a better job. Running a label properly is a full time job in itself with few financial rewards, and I already got one of those making my own music.

**NL** What does the upcoming CD-box mean to you?

**PT** I like dealing with the present and the future rather than the past so I deliberately had as little possible to do with it. Also, who cares what my own favourites are—I can’t be expected to have any proper perspective on two decades of musical output. I asked four people who had a lot of Ashtray

recordings to compile it. Then we put the package together, find all the tracks and do the artwork which is taking an age. I just want the fucking thing to be done then we can deal with the next 21 years instead of the last.

It all sounds great though. When I got the contributors track lists back I gulped and thought “I wouldn’t have picked any of this stuff as my best”. When I listened through, I’d have to admit that it had a coherence and has made me love many dusty back corners of the catalogue. Everyone did a really fine job.

Post-script—the box will be out in late November, all being well.

**ON FAILURE**

**NL** I’m very intruiged about the idea of failure, which a lot of your musical friends point out when speaking about you’re approach to making music.

**PT** Failure is more interesting than success because flaws, if properly handled, can point to other directions that the music could have taken. They hint at another corner that we could have turned and are a welcome bit of sand in the gears of a dull machine. Nothing is more boring than a perfect

masterpiece with no room for manoeuver or misinterpretation. When I started doing music I had hardly any expertise or equipment and flaws were inevitable. Things are obviously better now but I still keep this aesthetic in mind, a taste for rawness and the feeling that anything could happen. Plus it’s hard not to revel in the idea of being a failure if you work very hard on music that the world ignores!

**THE NEIL YOUNG QUESTION**

**NL** What is your favourite Neil Young solo?

**PT** I’m not so much of a Neil Young obsessive, to be honest. I like the overall vibe of his great 70s records more than the actual solos, but I have to say the playing on the long tracks on “Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere” is pretty great (with the other guitarist as well, the guy who died, Danny Whitten was it?). He never really let fly as much as that subsequently, did he?



**MD** I would have to agree that Everyone Knows... probably has the best guitar solos. Probably Like a Hurricane is most memorable for me though. And On The Beach is my favourite Neil Young album, I think it’s fantastic from beginning to end. Can’t really remember the solos though.

**PT** I can certainly remember, maybe even sing most of the solo on the title song. That one’s a beauty! On second thoughts I’ll pick that.

**NL** Thanks guys!

**Niels Latomme**

# ARNOLD DREYBLATT

**Arnold Dreyblatt is an American Minimalist composer for whom the idea ‘cult’ seems to be invented. His body of work explores new forms of transcendental rhythmic minimalism, played on prepared instruments—like a double bass with piano strings. Just as his visual art, Dreyblatt’s music works as a ‘rethinking of identity, history, culture, and memory’.**

**His c.v. reads as an impressive who’s who in the minimalist canon: student of La Monte Young and Pauline Oliveros; and records on legendary labels like Hat Hut, Tzadik, Table of Elements and most recently Oren Ambarchi’s Black Truffle label.**

**CA** I am going to start this interview bluntly: What is a string for Arnold Dreyblatt?

**AD** It is a big question. Actually after leaving La Monte Young it has been a period of going out on my own and because I did not have a traditional music training I had to understand this whole world of tuning and acoustics, experiment with different types of instruments even with wind instruments. Back then I was reading Hermann von Helmholtz.

When I came to the string, to experiment with the vibrating string, I used an experimental instrument which enabled an empirical relation to vibration. Only then did I understand that the vibrating string, in particular the monochord, was a sort of an instrument for teaching and understanding tuning and acoustics in many ancient cultures. Therefore I did a lot of research about that and began to make music which is based on a vibrating string. As it is written in books about acoustics “To excite a string means to set it into vibration.”

Back in the days when I was studying with the Vasulkas there was much interest in wave forms and light forms.

I came into music without any musical background so I needed to understand what is happening, all these numbers and tuning and complicated mathematics, or what it seemed to be complicated mathematics. With a string is simple because it can be divided and there you see one third it goes three times frequency and you can actually see it. It is a moving energy in time.

**CA** Could you talk about your music pieces in relation to these three “concepts”: One (string), Multiplicity (orchestra of many string instruments) and Unit(y) (the first two together)?

**AD** It is the principle of the waves we add to each other. A time wave is the simplest type of wave moving up and down and then we add what we call a complex wave form which means many waves in different frequencies that are related to each other through a mathematical relation.

With the instruments, I would say that first I added those who all play or perform on strings, maybe tubes or air columns, in vibrations that are related to each other. All this creates a big sound. I am interested in creating

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a big sound out of these related vibrations fusing together. Occasionally my solo base playing is reduced to one big string. There is a quote I often use from a French polymath which poses the question “Why does a string makes so many sounds at once?” What is in one sound? Therefore it is important that one string is sounded somewhere in the beginning of the concert because then you know how to listen to the sound that is being made altogether. When I perform solo I do two different pieces: the one is when the string vibrates and the other is magnetic resonance which is quite a departure for me.

**CA** You seem to be a math oriented mind but the result comes from a gut process. Where and how are the limits between these two set?

**AD** When I explain my music I say that first there is an intellect or what I call an intellectual or conceptual aspect where I combine these overtones, pitches, frequencies from different instruments that are related mathematically by their wave forms. That is one aspect but then there is banging on the string which produces these sounds and it is almost a reduced and simple activity. These two things happen at the same time. I think my music is very rhythmical but the rhythm is based on exciting, striking the strings and with-in that bringing other resonances in. It also has a very physical aspect and this comes from how I began dealing with the string and getting it to sound. There is a body, I am playing on a base which has a body; there is an expression in English “the resonating body”.

**CA** Can we also talk about a “system” behind it?

**AD** Yes, there is one which I did not invent. There were others before me like Young or Conrad although I use exciting strings and tunings which they did not use. But in essence it is a basic

system found in nature and what you have to do is make a scale out of that. There is nothing patented or anything. I have tried to write more complex rhythmic patterns with musicians. For instance the ensemble I have now (which will not play in Gent) is quite simple in terms of rhythm and it goes back to my early music. In fact, my first record is just been re-released as an LP by Drag City so that might be a good reference.

**CA** What is your relationship as a musician with restrictions and restrains? Are you generating them in order to pose questions, allow total freedom or you set them for negotiations?

**AD** In terms of reduction there is a sort of restriction. I am interested in certain resonances that are happening. An example would be when I use percussion. I like instruments that are metallic or drums, tuned very high with very little resonance so that it does not interfere with the strings and to give just the beat. There are restrictions in terms of how one plays. With bowed instruments I forbid vibrato. In case of rhythm compositions -which I can do only on the computer- I ask the musicians for no dynamics and it is very difficult for classic musicians to understand this. They think if it is slower it is going to be quieter.

**CA** I have noticed that you have a special relationship with your instruments or to put it a bit pretentious a kind of object-oriented ontology to the detriment of anthropocentrism. Could you tell me whether there is a refusal to control the instrument and let it speak for itself or something else?

**AD** Let us take the instrument which I am going to use for the show in Gent. It is a not a base but a double base, a contrabass body, a vibrating box with strings on of different length, in the



violin range. I am using it to do a specific thing. It is very narrow compared to how one usually uses an instrument. If you take the word instrument, in its larger sense like scientific instrument, it is a very specialized object. So my base has strings that do only one thing, or one and a half and nobody else can play it. But when it comes to instruments I did not change, there I am interested in one particular way of playing, the tonal range and also the way of getting the sound. And of course there is the philosophical aspect. You can say that this is expression but it is hard to say what is expression. So it is not my expression, or it is somehow but it is not making the music. I want to make things to sound. A good example is a brass instrument. All brass players learn to change the intonation on their instruments to fit equal temperament. When I have to work with somebody new who plays the trumpet or something else there is a moment when I say "Do not correct it. Just let it talk."

**CA** What is your position towards virtuosity?

**AD** Virtuosity means to bend the instrument to someone's will. A violin player can make a violin sound like anything he wants. It is almost like colonialism.(laughs) I am not interested in that. I am interested in what it does as an instrument, in a banal sense.

**CA** Now, everybody who has listened to your music knows that your teachers influenced generations of musicians and visual artists. I am obviously talking here about La Monte Young, Pauline Oliveros and the founders of The Kitchen the Vasulkas. What is your opin-

**ion about the importance of having a master, mentor, professor or role-model? What was your experience with them?**

**AD** It is very hard to quantify how much I have learned from them because with some I have spent one day, with others I just talked, with some I have spent two years in schools and with others it was just a moment. I also take as teachers people I have never met simply because I have read something by them on the right time or being exposed to their music at the right time. This can also have a major impact. My first music teacher was Pauline Oliveros during a workshop. I had no academic training (performing, singing, tones), although I used to do electronic music, and we spent an entire day which she did that with all participants individually. The sad thing now is the feeling that the only way one can meet musicians, be around them or talk to them is through school.

**CA** Looking at some footages with you and The Orchestra of Excited Strings I couldn't help but notice the exquisite chemistry between you. Tell me more about this project and the inner workings of this group.

**AD** This is different than when I have done recordings or when I had projects with let's say foreign musicians as in not working with them for a long period of time. Somehow in my own ensembles a sort of resonance is felt. In the early years we would give signals to each other in order for me to avoid counting bars. This works until now with my new group since 2009 which involves younger musicians.

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**CA** How do you pick them up? How do you find these new members?

**AD** In the early days it was different and it was a generation change in the '90s realizing that there are many people interested in this sort of music. In the late '90s a young guy in his 20s, Jörg Hiller, approached me and I saw a bit of me in him. We did some playing together, he brought some other friends from that generation. What I liked was performing in this very young scene. More interest has been shown from this side than from the academic milieu. They gave a new life to my music and I really enjoy that. There is also a certain type of musician who would like to play with me. Lately things have change so much. You have these kids who are not musically trained but start working with sound. In the '90s it happened that song forms or lyrics were

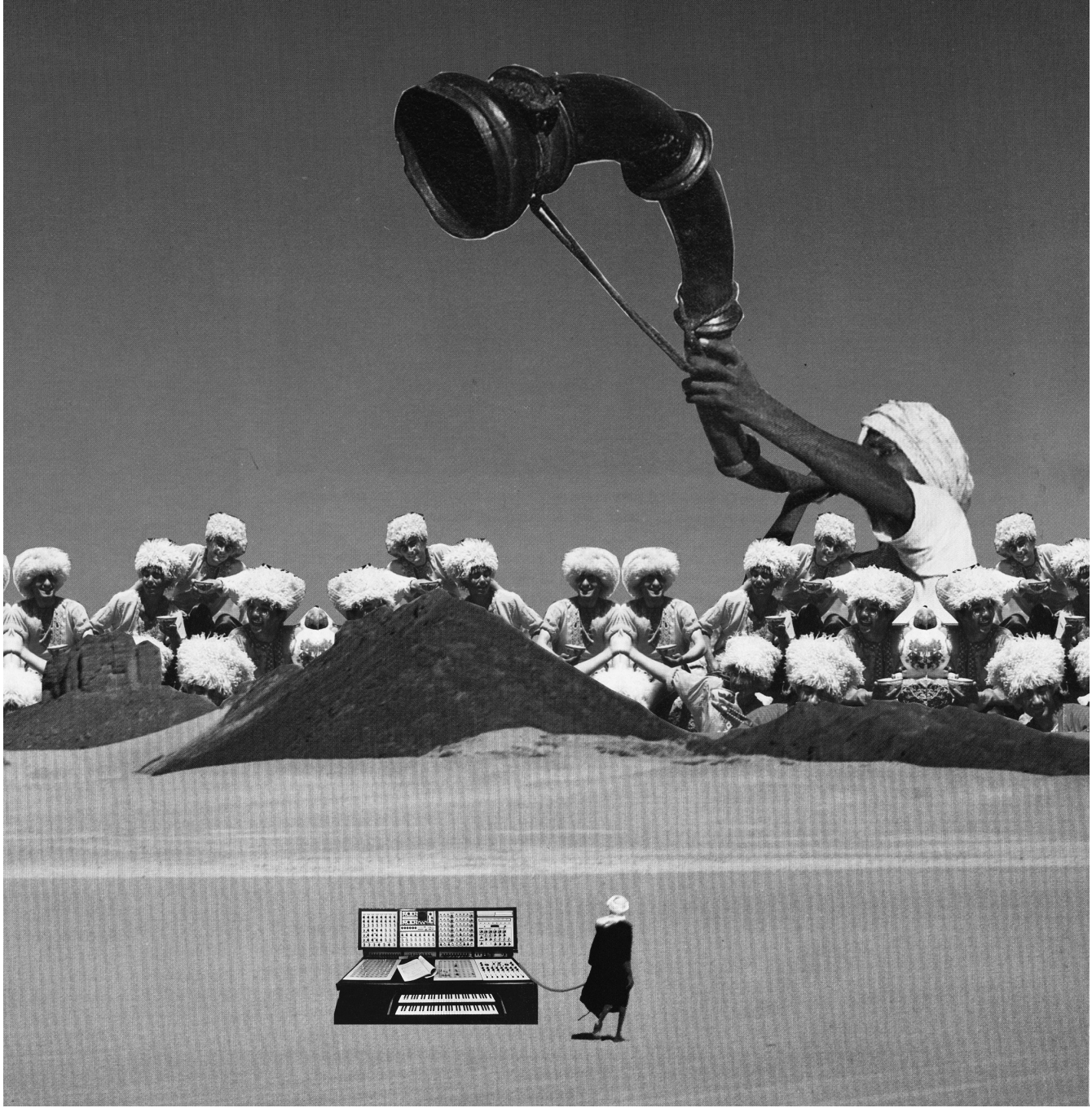
not necessary anymore. People could listen to sound and nothing more. It is a huge change.

**CA** And to conclude on a circular note: What is East for Arnold Dreyblatt?

**AD** Probably East-Coast(laughs). I did these projects in Eastern Europe in the 80's, my family comes from Eastern Europe and maybe that has something to do with it.

I was thinking recently of Bela Bartok who was looking for the origins of his music in Hungary. He was not nationalistic and understood at some point that Hungarian, Romanian or Serbian folk music were related, dialects of each other. Then there was the question "Where does it come from?" and he traveled to Turkey in Anatolia. So, I guess it comes from the East.

Cristina Amelia





Sarah Davachi is a young canadian composer and musician. She explores the deep spaces of hardcore minimalism through the magical rot that avant-garde music produced: analogue modular synthesis. Her music is rooted deeply in the mystic tradition of drone music. More specific, the beautiful branch planted and cultivated by two other grand ladies in electronic music, Eliane Radigue and Laurie Spiegel, with whom she shares the same interest in overtones hidden in the potential of electronic an acoustic instruments. For the records: Davachi holds a master’s degree in electronic music from the famous Mill’s College.

js The Eastern Daze Festival seeks to explore the link between ethnic music and avant-garde. How did non-Western music find its way into your aesthetic?

sd I wouldn’t say that non-Western musical practices factor into what I do in a totally technical or direct way. What I mean to say is that I don’t overtly try to incorporate tuning systems or timbral and melodic tropes or anything like that borrowed from those practices into my own work. Conceptually, though, I would say that I have been influenced by a lot of the theories that surround the function of music and sound in non-Western cultures, which I perceive to be a more contemplative or reflective one that is as much mental and aesthetic as it is physical and visceral.

js In another interview you mentioned how “inhabiting a concentrated headspace” is something you try to achieve with your music. This shows an interest in getting some sort of (be it passive) response from the audience. Is reaction crucial for you?

sd I would agree that the quote corresponds with an interest in getting some sort of response from the audience. I think of it more from a personal stance, though—in other words, I think about how I would want to engage with music like that if I were just the listener and try to set that up for the person on the other end as best as I can. That being said, though, I kind of make the music more to fulfill my own interests

in making those sound worlds exist for their own sake. Maybe it sounds selfish, but I often feel like I make music because it’s one way in which I can experience the kinds of sounds I want to hear myself; I suppose it’s as much about curiosity as it is about control. It’s still worth it to me even if I’m the only person who gets it. I also don’t have a problem with people taking away things from my music that I didn’t necessarily put in there, and I understand that that’s a fundamental and equally wonderful function of the aesthetic experience.



js The setup you’re using is quite extraordinary and in no way “easy to get”. What attracts you to these old, rare synths? What qualities are you looking for in them?

sd I’ve been working with these instruments quite closely in my day job for the past seven or so years and

# SARAH DAVACHI

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that’s really impacted the way that I view them as objects and things-in-themselves and not just instruments. They take up space, they have weight, a feel and limitations, and I think those are really wonderful things to get to know about an object.

I find software (in terms of producing sound—I use compositional software/DAWs all the time) to be expansive to a detriment sometimes, and that world has just never really appealed to me. I like being able to approach something fixed and break it apart to see what it can do. So in a way I feel like I view the synthesizer no differently than a piano or harp or clarinet or whatever. The sound produced is not just a result of the immediate sound-producing mechanism, but of the entire physical entity. There are no accidents in the physical construction and design of an acoustic instrument and I really believe that the same considerations have been taken into account in the design of electronic instruments and related equipment such as microphones and speakers. Sure, nowadays, you can get a great simulator of a Hammond B3/Leslie, but you’ll never be able to replicate the sound that occurs when you slightly jiggle one of the drawbars or when you’re attempting to push down a rickety, sixty-year-old plastic key as slowly as you possibly can. Those kinds of “analog” or “real” effects just simply can’t be simulated and they are the aspects that make that world of instrumentation so magical to me.

Another big part of why I work specifically with analog synthesizers in particular is because of their electronic instability. I love that they never sound the same and that they kind of do their own thing. A central component of the aesthetic experience that I try to create relates to the psychoacoustic effects (overtones/combination tones, etc.) that result when you have multiple sound sources just drifting slightly in and out of one another, which is really what makes the overall texture sound so lush and spacious. Again, the same principle is true in the world of acoustic instruments, too.

js You’re planning on putting out a completely acoustic record, how is it to be working with musicians rather than synths? I can imagine it’s very different, but maybe there are some similarities too?

sd I guess my experience working with other musicians is a bit different from working with synthesizers in the sense that I don’t have as much control to experiment and see what happens; I just sort of tell people what I want and hope that they can make it happen.

That being said, in the past I’ve sometimes done all of my own playing, even if I’m trying to record instruments that I have no training in, like violin or flute. It works well enough for me to get what I need, but this time around I’m working with professional instrumentalists—an operatic soprano as well as a cellist and violinist—and that’s been amazing because they can take my ideas and do things that I would have had no idea how to even approach.

I’ve never composed for voice prior to this, so when I was working with my soprano, I spent a lot of time with her beforehand discussing what was possible and how she could translate a certain idea that I had. When I’m the one who is playing an acoustic instrument that I know intimately—like when I’m recording organ or piano or something like that—it’s actually pretty similar to how I work with electronics. There’s a lot of experimenting and playing around to see what works. Once I find something that I like I follow it through a bit, always recording what I’m doing. It’s different if I’m preparing something for a live context, but when I’m recording I rarely do a full pass of something and just let it be as is. Typically I record smaller portions of things and then work with them in Logic later, which is where the piece really comes together. So, at that point, it makes little difference whether the sounds I’m working with are acoustic or electronic in nature.

I find the best similarity between the acoustic and electronic instruments (at least the older ones that I work with) is that they both have limitations. Yes, synthesizers are perhaps more flexible in their range, but at the end of the day they each only do certain things that are unique to their idiom. I really love that about older electronic instruments.

Jannis Van De Sande

# GÖRKEM ŞEN

Görkem Şen’s first musical memories are the quirky, self invented songs a childhood friend of his used to sing. The complete freedom of expression in these unlocked something deep and fundamental in him; a need to say something that was personal and original.

Some 30 years later Görkem has developed just that; a musical language that refers to old Turkish folk and minimalist electronic music played on a self invented instrument that looks like an absurd composite of cast away parts of classical instruments; the Yaybahar.

Before this, Görkem used analog synthesizers, computer and electronics

to produce his drone like improvisations, but after a while a need to manipulate sound through a physical instrument began to rear it’s head.

Having a background in engineering and carpenting, Görkem started to build his own instruments, looking for certain timbres and ways of expression he couldn’t find in electronic music.

Görkem started out, heavily inspired by a book about sacred music by Indian mystic Inayat Khan. In that a monk builds a string instrument with materials found in nature and starts playing his music and messages filled with spiritual insights on top of a mountain, the sound vibrating all through the country.

The Yaybahar is a unique invention, capable of producing sounds that eerily echo analog synthesizers; amplitude modulation, delay effects, reverb, drum and stab sounds and string sounds.

Görkem Şen uses every possible angle of it to produce a music that is

meditative and eerie; exploring micro-tonalities and rhythms, channeling the long minimal drones of Pauline Oliveiros and forgotten Turkish folk melodies into a musical language that is unmistakably his very own.

Wouter Vanhaelemeesch





# INSANLAR

Once in Istanbul, on the Taksim square, my attention got drawn towards an old man in a wheelchair, covered with christmas lights. He played a one-stringed banjo, and chanted strange rants. The first time I heard *Kime Ne*, the debut album of Insanlar, it reminded me of this magical moment of outworldish beauty—to be found on one of the many obscure streets in this overwhelming and labyrinth-like city. In a similar way, Insanlar seemed to come from nowhere. Digging deeper, I found out that they emerged out of the Istanbul underground jam and club scene, blending transcendental sufi jams, Anatolian Rock music, 17th century poems with electronics. Insanlar is based at the MiniMüzikhol, a club which covers an array of genres, incorporated at an old cultural building, just a stone's throw of the famous Taksim square.

We sat down through a dirty sounding Facetime connection and talked with Insanlar's Baris K, about his inspirations and about the world in which Insanlar started.

**NL** Hey Barış, how are you? I was wondering in which part of Istanbul you are living?

**BK** I live close to Taksim, on the Istiklal road, just behind Galatasaray.

**NL** From my Western point of view, I have the impression that Insanlar comes out of nowhere. Is this so, or has the band been around since long and are you famous in Turkey?

**BK** We are not really famous, nor mainstream, so you can say we are underground. It's a club curated jam band. My friend Cem Yıldız, who is playing the saz in Insanlar, has a wider audience and is an appreciated musician in world-music. But you cannot consider Cem as 'mainstream'.

**NL** What is the state of the underground music scene in Istanbul?

**BK** Turkey has a special situation, musical genres aren't separated. If you look for 'underground' music, you maybe wouldn't find it so easily. But you have a continuum of genres from post-rock to electronica. A lot of the musicians do not stick to one genre, but think universal. So there's always a scene, with everywhere pieces. But, like in Europe, if you only follow mainstream bands, it's hard to get into to things that are beyond that.

**NL** Can you tell me about MiniMüzikhol, which seems to be some sort of focal point for Insanlar?

**BK** It's a nightclub near Taksim, in a nice small place, with furniture and carpets. It is a cosy living room in an apartment, located in an old cultural building. In the eighties, this building was a lively cultural centre, with theater, music and even a gay bar. Six years ago, after being in some other places, we became part of it and we took it over in some way. *(laughs)*. It a special building with unique spirits and MiniMüzikhol is the new outcome of it.

The first event we organized, was a festival for which we invited a combination of old Turkish 70ties musicians, from the Anatolian rock and

pop scene. There were free concerts, workshops and big concerts in a hangar. The succes of the festival, made us decide to start putting up concerts in the club, ranging from salsa nights to concerts of legendary musicians like Derdiyoklar.

The last one asked us if we knew a band that could back him for his concerts. And we thought that we actually should form him a band instead of finding an existing band. The club had a nice scene, with musicians coming from different genres and areas. It gave birth to Insanlar, 5 years ago.

**NL** Do you see yourself fit in the tradition of Anatolian Rock Music, like Edip Akbayran and Moğollar?

**BK** A part of the band is surely an heir of this scene. For me personally it was the motivation to put us in some direction. And there is no way you can get out of it, of course.

**NL** Is Insanlar influenced by the ethnic and sufi traditions of turkish traditional music?

**BK** On a philosophical level, the local philosophies of Anatolian Alevis tribes influenced us *(one of the main two branches of islam in Turkey, which is centred around Sufi ideas, and displays a humanist*

*form of spirituality and freedom, red)*. The tribe has a lot of elements of Central-Asian, Middle-Eastern and Anatolian traditions. It out a peaceful message, closer to Zen Buddhism. For example the lyrics of *Kime Ne*, the record we released, come from a Alevi Poem from the 13th Century, which reflects the rebellious attitude very well. So, of course, Insanlar is born into these traditions.

**NL** How do you feel about being a part of a festival which claims to highlight the mutual influences between avant-garde music and ethnic music?

**BK** Well, I think it's all about social interaction, like in the renaissance. The Middle-East always kept record of all the old philosophies, and the good parts of it. It lights the fire, even now.



If you see all the Arabs at the Gezi park, people are fed up with something, so it's no surprise that people get inspired by all these old ideas of peace, harmony and humanism.

**NL** How do you feel about this refugee crisis, from your point of view, if we take into account that Turkey stands as the port to Europe?

**BK** There are bigger political powers at work. State powers, bigger market politics, there's a lot of things going on there. These people are not fleeing from Syria because of other things, they just try to save their lives. If you stay, you don't know what you have to face, so they just run. We as a Western country—I see Turkey as a Western country, because we are an instrument of the West—, are responsible for what is happening now and there. And is happening since Iraq, and Afghanistan and we know who to blame.

**NL** Talking about that, is Insanlar driven by a political activism?

**BK** Not on that level, but a philosophical poem can be stronger then hardcore activism, I think. The message is important. It's important to find together a better solution, instead of protest

blindly and position you against each other. There is a higher level of intimacy at play, or in a more humorous way. But I'd prefer not to be asked... You don't decide this consciously, it comes naturally. I don't know what to think about the idea of designing something like that. Insanlar is not a designed band, we don't have structure, nor rehearsals. It is a jam band, in which we don't think that much. We are 3 or 4 persons making in the moment a solo live set, and then synchronization and harmony happens. Everybody is free on there own. I hope that it's about individuals getting connected in the music.

**NL** Where you involved of the uprisings against tearing down the trees at the Gezi park (in 2013, Turkish prime minister Erdoğan decided to tear down the Gezi Park for raising new buildings. This decision was the spark for uprisings, giving expression to a lot frustrations of mostly secular Turks about Erdoğan's enlightened dictatorial politics, red.)

**BK** Some days I was, because some of our activist friends were there. But before the uprisings started. It was nice, but then it became some sort of civil war in which two forces in the country try to crush each other. It didn't felt right on that moment. But I don't want to blame anyone, because people were right on what they wanted and needed.

**NL** You're weren't looking for opposition?

**BK** No, I'm not a soldier. I'm not a fighter in that sense. The soldiers and the armed forces are the problem. I cannot get out and be part of another armed group. But in the Syrian case, it's a different thing.

For them, the bombs are at their doors. But here, during the uprisings, I didn't want to see this anger coming upon this country. But we'll see after the elections, I'm going to vote and then we will wake up and see nothing has changed. *(laughs)*

**NL** Maybe your music will change things?

**BK** Well, I hope so, but it's a slower and small revolution I think.

**NL** I am intriged by the idea of Kara, which is Turkish for 'black' literally, but refers to more unseen and not-to-be-spoken-about aspects of the world? Can you tell something about this?

**BK** Well, Kara is part of my surname 'Karademir', which means 'dark iron'. And Barış means peace. But about 'dark', if I think about all these things happening, last year it culminated in some sort of momentum. this country feels like a dark comedy theater piece.

**NL** Ok, thanks a ton for the time and looking forward to see you in Vooruit.

Niels Latomme



# KARKHANA

The notion of a supergroup used to be a marketing idea to sell uninspired jams by rock stars. It died righteously after the monster called live Aid. But last year a record popped up by the band Orchestre Omar, with a couple of jams inspired by the great work of the famous Egyptian Guitar player Omar Khorsid. Khorsid was a key figure in the 70ties scene in Cairo, he was part of the orchestra who backed Ouhm Khaltoum, and his solo works blended Egyptian classical music, far out East Coast surf riffs and experimental cosmic synth music. His music was pretty unkown to the west until 4 years ago Sublime Frequencies re-released his music.

Orchestre Omar was born out of a gathering by the so-called grand fathers of Middel East improv and experimental scene—Charbel Haber, Maurice Louca, Osman Arabi, Sam Shalabi, Sharif Sehnaoui, Tony Elieh and Umut Caglar. It seems that the transnational improv scene at the other site of the Mediterranean Sea found eachother in the Orchestra and soon the satellite band Karkhana started out, with a core line-up of the Egypts Osama Shalabi and Maurice Louca, the lebanese Sharif Sehnaoui and Mazen Kerbay, and the Turks Özün Usta and Umum Caglar.

We met comic artist and Trumpet player Mazen Kerbay in Berlin, whereto he just moved.



**NL** The festival claims to highlight the parallels and the mutual influence between Western Avant-Garde music and Non-Western music. We see that both share a common interest in the notion of transcendentalism. As being raised in an Arabic country, how do you feel about this?

**MK** I definitely feel the big influence of Western music on the Arabic world. On a personal level I'm influenced for sure by the Middle-East. However, as a musician my first influence was the free jazz of John Coltrane, Evan Parker and Peter Brötzmann. So I don't feel the direct influence of Arabic music, because I don't play and never intended to play Arabic music—it's like asking Evan Parker what the influence of British Folk music on his music. But I recognize the Arabic context has an influence on who I am, as a human being first and as a musician. Arabic music has been around me all my live, sometimes I hated it when my parents put it on for instance. I would define myself as an Arab playing Western avant-garde music, and in it lies a paradox—my thinking blends two opposite forces: being an Arab, influenced by Western music, and I don't understand it myself completely. But this is not so uncommon: John Coltrane used oriental modes and appropriated them, although he is still playing free jazz, not Arabic music.

**NL** Is transcendentalism something important for you as a musician?

**MK** It's very important, especially in improvisation. I like this idea of music

which isn't rooted anymore. You feel of course that Afro-American free jazz is rooted in the black community, but the great thing about improvisation music, is that you can adopt the language everywhere. I could play with one Japanese drummer or with an Indonesian musician, and although we never have met, each of us can come with his highly personal language, and share this. This music works as an international language, cause improv music got rid of the idea that the basis of music should be conventional structures and aspects of music, like rhythm, modes and harmony. This makes the music open, which is great.

I've been reluctant to define myself as an Lebanese artist. My work should be judged against the history of music, and not against my background and the context I've been born in. It's very diminishing to be classified as an Arab or Lebanese musician, for any music or musician. You don't say Picasso is a Spanish artist, he's in the first place an artist. Of course I could define (and sell) myself as the head of the Lebanese avant-garde—which Sharif and I are, in a way—, but it's too easy to do something not so great, but being looked upon as great because you were the first in this or that context. So it's very difficult and dangerous to delve into this, as an artist you have to be aware of your influences, and be aware that you just move a small stone in the giant river which the history of music is. You are challenging the whole music, not the avant-garde in Lebanon. It's easy to be the best in something, if you are the only one.

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**NL** It's more about the individual expression for you?

**MK** Totally, even there is a community, which we are pushing with a festival and it makes me happy to see the scene is growing in Lebanon. Still, if your are coming from by instance Ethiopia, or Lebanon, people seem to be surprised by the idea that there is avant-garde in Ethiopia or Lebanon. Of course there is, it is as hard to find out about Evan Parker in New York than in Beirut. Where you are, you always have to be curious and to dig to find out about experimental stuff.

**NL** You realize that the idea of an avant-garde or experimental artist, expressing a highly individual language is a very Western idea.

**MK** Maybe, mostly European avant-garde and experimental musicians tend to. More than Americans. There are many European things influencing me, maybe this is one of them—I never thought of this like that.

Although, if you look to one of my biggest references—John Coltrane, always—, the Americans have a very mystical way of seeing music, and take it as something for the community. That's where Black Spiritual Jazz came from, music for the people, to dance on. Where Peter Brötzmann, together with a lot of the Europeans, claim the complete opposite—it's art for the art. Brötzmann called even one of his albums 'Fuck The World'. In Europe the communal idea has completely disappeared.

This highly individual and European approach influenced me. My background is in any way very European, also in literature—the fact that I speak French since I was very young, it gives me a very European point to look at things. Although, as a human I am less individualistic than Europeans. I still have this Lebanese background in which family and the community is taking a very important part of life. I cannot say why those things are like that, I can point out how I arrived here, but not why. I'm even not interested in knowing, the most important thing is to do the work.

**NL** Maybe you could say that the European fascination for the Middle-

East, the Other and the Exotic makes the West forget how close the Middle-East is, and how less we differ. We have a shared history.

**MK** Totally, there is not at all a sharp distinction between the West and The Middle-East. That's the main reason why I don't want to define me as an Lebanese artist. I fight against this Orientalism. It's not easy, because if I talk in my first book about the war, it's easier to got it published than when I would have talked about spring. The West expect us to talk about this, although you don't expect a German to talk about the Holocaust. Even when you are not speaking about it, people tend to look for it. If a make this helicopter like sounds with my trumpet, people tell me it reminds them of the war, but if European players make the same sort of sounds, people hear something else—a dentist, or a workshop. In the mind of the receiver, there is already something twisted. I don't say this a bad or good thing, but it's a fact. When you are coming from this or that region, people interpret the music based on that knowledge.

**NL** That's what I am actually doing right now, right?

**MK** Yes.

**NL** Let's talk about the music then! Tell me where Karkhana comes from and how does the band relates to Orchestre Omar?

**MK** Well, Orchestre Omar started out as an all guitarist band. Since all those people, from Turkey, Canada and Egypt were here in Beirut, it was a great opportunity to do another group. We liked this Middle-Eastern connection, because for us it always has been very difficult to find other people playing this music in this region. When we discovered that in Istanbul is a vivid improv scene, we were very happy to meet them. Of course there is a scene in Istanbul, but if you look to Syria, Palestine, to Morocco, there is no scene for this music. So we were happy to find these like minded people so close.

Karkhana is totally improv, if you compare it to Orchestre Omar, which is



more composed. We played a gig which was recorded and led to the record.

Funnily enough, without talking about it, the sound went towards this oriental, Middle Eastern edge by the instrumentation. Although is totally experimental and avant-garde (I don't like to say avant-garde, because after doing this for 15 years, you cannot call it avant-garde anymore, I think), because we don't use for instance Arab modes. We don't have an agenda in this, the outcome sounded oriental, but we are no extremists, so we didn't think this was bad.

**NL** If you look at one of your great inspirations, John Coltrane, or like minded people as the Art Ensemble of Chicago, the were very aware about identity and about constructing a new identity for Afro-Americans. Is this something which keeps you busy?

**MK** I don't think about this, because I work very instinctively. I don't have an agenda. In this I'm maybe very Western, very centered on my own work and very individualistic.

It's a war I don't have to fight, because I don't live as a third generation Lebanese in bad conditions in for instance Germany. So I don't have to bring back and construct a new identity for myself. I chose to being influenced by the Western culture, it was never forced upon me. On the contrary, it actually opened the world for me, without jeopardizing my own world. In way, you could say I think about not being seen as an Arab artist, but just as a musician.

**NL** You are also a comic artist, and it seems that you have a completely different approach towards that art than towards music, which aims towards a radical improvisation?

**MK** I see both arts as something completely different, without any priority for one of them. Drawing comics is something very personal and introvert, which I do alone. When I finish a book and it comes out, it's actually dead for me. It's my past, which becomes the present for the reader. While music is something which lives on the moment I'm doing it for an audience. It's much more direct, talking directly to the audience. At least, I always thought they were completely opposed things for my.

But, when I started to talk extensively about both, it occurred to me that there are more similarities then I would admit. For a book, I never work with a proper scenario, stories develop like improvisation in music. It was always very loose. Recently I even developed a simple technique to draw live, like I play music—in combination with music by Sharif—, I draw things, it's projected and at the end they are gone. I actually took me years to get to this.

Also in my music, I also want to start working on pieces with overdubs and work towards a finished product—like a book. So the things are not so opposite as I first thought.

The last thing which is similar, is that I don't refuse humor in my music. It's not that I make jokes while playing, and I am very serious about my music. But when it makes people laugh, it's beautiful I think. I think it's very hard to make someone laugh, much harder than to make someone cry. It a thing that differentiate us.

**NL** Why did you choose for the trumpet?

**MK** Actually that is a very funny story in itself. It's Sharif's fault. When we were young, we had this big group of friends with whom we came together to have fun, smoke hasjiesh and listen to music. Me and Sharif were always the last staying up till 6 in the morning listening to music. Mostly good rock, kraut rock and stuff like that. When Sharif moved to France, he admitted to me that he started listening to jazz—my response was, 'Sharif, jazz is for old people'. But



he kept on repeating I should listen to John Coltrane. One day I found the Atlantic records by Coltrane, with this beautiful piece with Eric Dolphy on the flute, which hooked me. Sharif started to bring me cd's by Coltrane and others out of France. That's how I got to improv and free jazz.

To that point, I was 18, I never played music. I was already sure to be a comic artist. Sharif was more passionate by music. On day he was sitting at my place and told me that he got this trumpet as a present, but didn't do anything with it. He offered it to me, and that's where I started as a musician, as a joke actually.

At first we were with 8 friends doing so-called free jazz, but it was

shitty music. But I kept on playing with Sharif, and his wife Christine, who played saxophone. And little by little, the others fell off. One day we were playing, and my ex-wife came in the room and asked us which cd we were listening to. It occurred then to me that I really got into something, and that it became real and serious. I was surprised myself.

**NL** It's interesting to hear you telling this. Last year I realized, something in common between experimental music and ethnic music seems to be that they are born out of little peer to peer communities. In little villages, or in small groups of friends, like yours. It seems that these isolated groups are a great soil to grow new music on it?

**MK** Totally, we were isolated, I'm talking pre-internet. This music wasn't easy to find. At that moment we never dreamt that what we were doing would be appreciated. While nowadays after 15 years this festival and the audience for improv is still growing in Lebanon. And it's young people coming to this festivals, not old free jazz fans, like in Europe. For long I seemed to be the only one playing free music in Lebanon, and a lot of people told me that I should focus on what I was talented in—in comics—, not in this shit music. But one day, someone came to this cd-shop where I worked, he asked me to play together. Which was unbelievable. We formed then the A Trio, which still goes on. And it grows and grows.

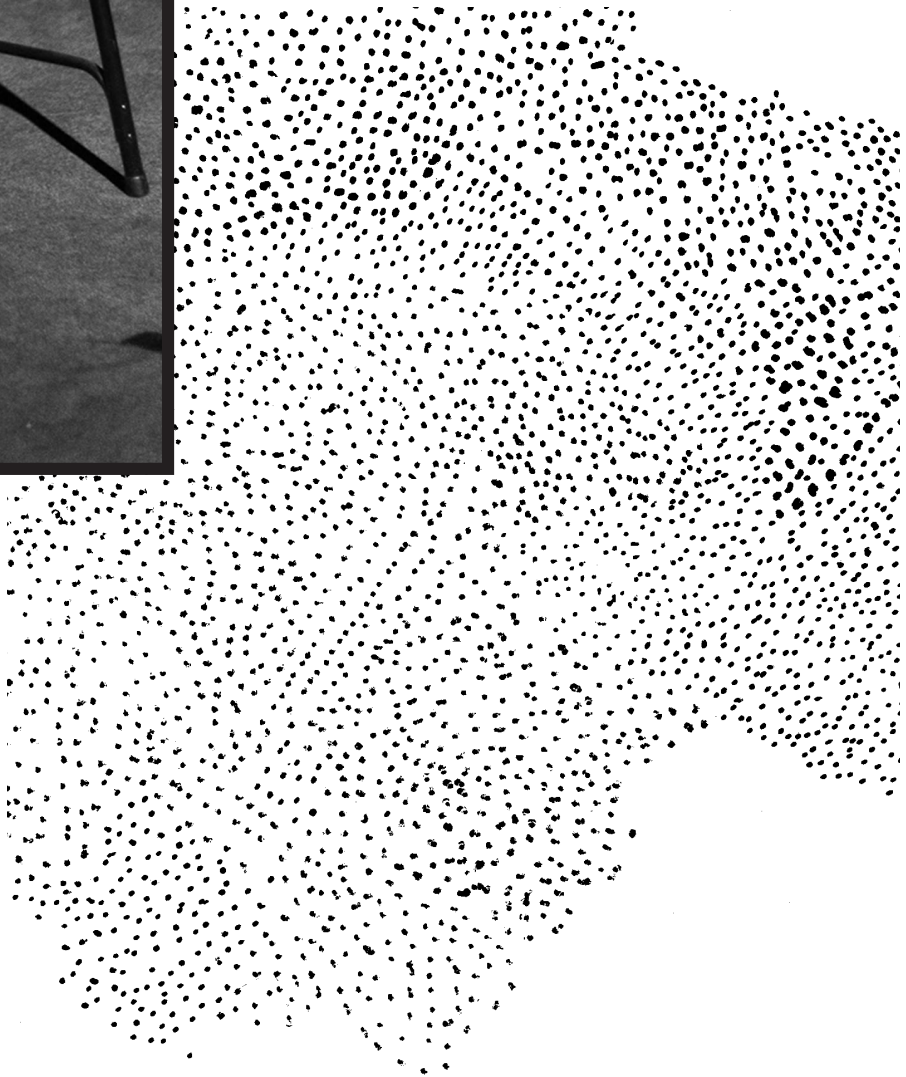
**NL** A last question: did the war put an urgency in Lebanese free music, if you compare it to European music? I ask this, not because of my interest of the consequences of the war, but because I have the impression that there is a vitality missing in the West, because it doesn't need new forms.

**MK** Well, I don't like to talk too much about this. Because, it's the same with being a Lebanese, that being defined it creates this context for my music. But as a kid, I accepted the war, and its sounds as something normal. I didn't thought about it that much, and I didn't felt traumatized, it felt natural. It was later that I questioned it, when I became 25. The Wire did once an interview with me, and they put this on top 'War Child Mazer Kerbay', which I hated, because I only talked for 2 minutes about this experience. So I'm always reluctant to talk about this.

But it was later that something changed with the 33 day war in 2006. After the war in the 70ties, Lebanon became a cultural wasteland. While in the 60ties Beirut was a the cultural capital in the Middle East. There was a blossoming art, poetry and proze scene. For instance, one year after the premiere of Ionesco in Paris, it was performed in Arab in Beirut. Except, funnily, for music—even thought Stockhausen performed his pieces in Beirut.

After the war, our generation had a craving for new things. All the known artists from Beirut—the good ones and the bad ones—are from this generation. The audience is still craving for something new. I always found it fascinating how my parents, who were both artists, kept on creating during the war. And I wondered how I would react as an artist during wartime. Sadly this question was answered during the 33 day war, in which I never felt so creative. So what you feel about the West, makes totally sense to me. It's sad to say that peace is not good for art. A war causes this vitality, and this urge to create a new world and new forms. It's bad for people, but good for art.

Niels Latomme



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**The Eastern Daze  
Festival explores the  
pure state of the Here  
and Now, conveyed by  
transcendentalism—  
the focal point and a  
mutual influence of  
non-western, ethnic  
music and minimalist  
avant-garde music.**

**The tagline: Music  
from the outer regions.**

**By KRAAK, Vooruit, oerstof & Europalia 12.**

**T H E A V A N T G U A R D I A N 28 NOVEMBER 2015 at VOORUIT, GENT**

**DOMZAAL**

**SARAH DAVACHI 14:15**

**ANTTI TOLVI 15:10**

**GÖRKEM SEN 16:25**

**ARNOLD 17:15**

**DREYBLATT**

**BALZAAL**

**KARKHANA 20:15**

**ASHTRAY 21:30**

**NAVIGATIONS**

**INSANLAR 22:45**

**DJ BARIS K. 23:45**



### **UPCOMING KRAAK RELEASES**

#### **OUT IN JANUARY**

**K086 Razen — Endrhymes — LP**

**K087 Calhau! — U — LP**

#### **OUT IN MARCH**

**K088 Sea Urchin — Yaqaza — LP**

**K089 Shetahr — 7"**